

**Medicine Chest**

# Mayo Doctor Challenges Cigaret-Cancer Statistics

**Says True Meaning of Figures Unknown,  
With 'Huge Blunders' Committed Already**

By JOHN TROAN  
Scripps-Howard Science Writer

Figures DO lie, a well-known health statistician insists. And as far as Mayo Clinic's Dr. Joseph Berkson is concerned, the figures linking cigaret smoking to lung cancer don't even add up to a half-truth.

At most, he declares in the Cancer Bulletin, a University of Texas publication for physicians, "this is about a 15 per cent truth."

The doctor points out that among persons covered by the statistical studies "smokers have a higher death rate from all causes together" — with lung cancer accounting for no more than 15 per cent of "the total excess."

Doesn't this indict cigaret smoking even more? Not at all, Dr. Berkson retorts.

"The idea that cigaret smoking causes all these many deaths from all these many causes does, indeed, seem seriously questionable," he says. "There is not any scientifically known pharmacologic or physical explanation for so widespread and multifarious an effect."

Actually, Dr. Berkson contends, "we are not within a thousand miles of understanding" what these statistics do mean.

The doctor, however, does offer some possible explanations:

RESEARCHERS who claim cigarets cause lung cancer have committed "huge blunders" through "uncritical use of statistics."

THERE IS "a constitutional difference between smokers and non-smokers." (The non-smokers, Dr. Berkson quips, are a "hardy, self-protective lot" who "should have little difficulty fending off tuber-

culosis or even cancer" after being able to resist the cigaret advertisers.)

THERE WAS "just as much lung cancer" before heavy smoking came into vogue but doctors couldn't diagnose it as well.

EVEN IF there is more lung cancer now, much of it is due simply to the fact people are living longer.

Dr. Berkson notes that suspected cancer-causing chemicals found in cigaret smoke are present in such tiny amounts "as to be incapable of producing" the disease. Indeed, he says, nobody has been able "to produce lung cancer experimentally in animals by smoking."

P. S.—The doctor says he himself doesn't smoke cigarets, and "I own no tobacco stock."



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